

PE2123: Update air quality standards in Scotland to align with 2021 World Health Organisation guidelines

Submission from Scottish Environment Protection Agency, 2 July 2025

Q1. Do you support amending the Air Quality Standards (Scotland) Regulations 2010 to align with the 2021 WHO air quality guidelines?

SEPA is supportive of any alignment of Scotland's air quality standards and objectives with the revised 2021 World Health Organisation (WHO) Global Air Quality Guidelines and European Union (EU) Directive on ambient air and cleaner air for Europe (Directive (EU) 2024/28).

SEPA will be providing technical support to the Scottish Government in their consideration of existing domestic air quality legislation and the development and implementation of any future Scottish Government proposals in this area. The decision on whether the requirements of the 2021 WHO Guidelines and Directive (EU) 2024/28 are adopted (and to what extent) rests with the Scottish Government.

Q2. What progress has been made in reducing nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter in Scotland since 2022/23, when we last sought views on this?

There have been no exceedances of annual mean air quality objectives for any of the air quality pollutants (where data has been representative) at automatic monitoring stations across Scotland since 2022 and therefore all local authorities are currently complying with the legal requirements for air quality in their areas.

SEPA is currently awaiting the Annual Progress Reports (APRs) from local authorities for the data reporting year of 2024 and compliance with the current air quality objectives will continue to be assessed. At the time of writing, the total number of Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) declared in Scotland has reduced to 18 with further AQMA revocations/amendments planned to be completed in 2025 (in total 43 AQMA have been declared in Scotland).

Compliance with the air quality objectives and further removal of AQMA demonstrates that the positive trend in air quality has continued to be achieved across Scotland. However, it is also recognised that meeting any updated air quality objectives which may be implemented by the Scottish Government will require concerted action to achieve continual improvements in air quality through a variety of existing and new policy and practical measures, across a range of sectors.

Q3. To what extent has scientific and public health evidence about air quality evolved since the current standards were adopted? In your answer you could refer, for instance, to impacts on nitrogen dioxide or fine particulate matter on

particular groups of people, the effect of Low Emission Zones (or other interventions of a similar nature) on air quality, or any new information or data about the effect of burning particular types of fuel.

Nil response.

Q4. The Scottish Government is currently reviewing the CAFS2 strategy with the goal of establishing a long-term policy framework to replace the strategy once it expires. What practical steps can the Scottish Government set out in its new strategy to reduce nitrogen dioxide and fine particulate matter levels?

To date, the Scottish Government's CAFS strategy programme has brought together partner organisations across Scotland to deliver air quality improvements and multiple benefits across a range of cross-cutting policy areas and disciplines and using a variety of mechanisms and measures. This partnership approach has resulted in significant improvements to how we manage air quality and sources of air pollution in Scotland. It is likely that a similar approach will be required to develop, implement and deliver any Scottish Government long-term policy framework for air quality.

SEPA has had preliminary discussions with the Scottish Government on the requirements of the revised 2021 WHO Guidelines and EU Directive (EU) 2024/28 (and potential implications) and also provided a visual analysis of air quality monitoring and modelling data to assess what the current status of compliance would be with these updated air quality objective requirements and what additional measures may be required to work towards, or ensure, future compliance.

SEPA will continue to provide support to the Scottish Government on the current implementation and delivery of CAFS2, the preparatory work for the review of CAFS2 and development of Scotland's future long-term air quality policy framework.